13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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version of the foot-plough. This is an almost unexplored field of rural history. Mr. Aitken is of the opinion, however, that the left-sided plough goes with the use of the right hand as holding hand.

At any rate it is interesting to find that in Ireland the majority of diggers use the right foot, and although in theory the wooden foot-rest of the native one-eared spade can be fitted either to left or right of the narrow blade it is, in the west, almost invariably on the right side. Presumably only habitually left-handed people use the left foot. In eastern Ireland, on the other hand, and particularly in the Protestant districts of the north-east, the left foot is normally the digging-foot, though judging from the proportions of right to left (about one to three in the north-east), the old Irish stocks continue to dig with the right foot. Hence there is a basis of fact in the phrase 'digging with the wrong foot'. (To say that someone digs with the other foot is in Ireland an oblique way of referring to his religious faith.) The old Irish spade, we have seen, is a highly specialized tool. It may have been preceded by some kind of hoe or planting stick such as are represented today by the graffan or the steeveen which we describe in the following chapter.

We have no direct evidence of Bronze Age ploughs in Ireland, though marks of furrows have been observed underneath burial barrows of that period in Jutland and Holland and it has been claimed that the *ard* had reached the west Baltic region before the end of the Neolithic phase. However this may be the sod-cutting spade, which could be supplemented by the wooden shovel, is not likely to have been introduced much before the beginning of the Christian era, since it required an efficient knowledge of iron-working. By facilitating the building of ridges it would have improved crop yields during a climatic period, the sub-Atlantic, which was even wetter than at present. A mould-board plough capable of forming ridges did not reach Ireland on present evidence until about the seventh century, and as we have seen it had not been adopted in parts of the west until the nineteenth century. Thus the narrow spade, coming into use at about the same time as oats, would have been a factor in stabilizing settlement by permitting ridge cultivation on the outfield grazing ground round about. This is speculative,

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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is a three-story tower house with its south and west walls partially destroyed. The middle story of the castle rests on vaults, and there are carved corbels projecting from the north and east walls. It is believed that the castle was assaulted in 1652 from the land side by Cromwellian troops, who disembarked at the back of the island and hauled their heavy cannons across the limestone pavement, unimpeded by the stone fences which stand today, to the monastery above the tower.

Queen Elizabeth annexed Inis Beag for the Crown in 1586 because of its strategic position, after two contending Irish families had appealed to her following their fierce battle for its possession, in which all of the folk may have been slaughtered. From 1586 until the first decade of the eighteenth century, Commonwealth, Loyalist, and Williamite forces were stationed in Inis Beag most of the time, and until 1886, when obtained by the Irish Land Commission, the island was owned by a succession of absentee Anglo-Irish landlords. When Cromwellian troops forced the surrender of Loyalists in 1652, the population of Inis Beag once again may have been decimated, although one legend holds that only males were put to the sword. The island after 1655 became a port for transshipment of clerics who were exiled to the West Indies. This was the time when Cromwell revenged himself on Irish Catholics and their Protestant allies by appropriating for his followers more than half of the Irish soil and leveling harsh political, commercial, and religious penalties. Thousands of priests were banished, including all of the bishops for a time, in his crusade.

It was after the Restoration in 1660 that the land of Inis Beag was divided into quarters, half-quarters, and smaller units and assigned to families. My genealogical research reveals that all of the families of Inis Beag trace descent from immigrants who arrived in the island during and after the last half of the seventeenth century. The early arrivals, as well as any survivors, may have intermarried and interbred with soldiers posted in the island, for anthropometric and blood group analyses (buttressed by surname and historical evidence and local legend) show that the folk more closely resemble the northern English than they do their mainland cousins. A Dublin humor magazine featured a cartoon, not favored in nativistic quarters, showing Inis Beag men in traditional attire playing cricket.

The islanders still express considerable bitterness over the conditions of poverty and servitude experienced by their ancestors during the 300 years that they lived under alien landlords. All of the excesses of foreign domination suffered by mainland peasants were suffered by Inis Beag folk, but were aggravated by the ordinary hardships of island living. Little is known of local events in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, until the island was "rediscovered" by Petrie and O'Flaherty. There was trading between Inis Beag and communities along the mainland coast for many miles, and ships passing by often dropped anchor at the island; but at that time this region of Ireland was very much isolated and seldom visited. A military garrison once again was established in Inis Beag for a brief period during the Napoleonic Wars, when the English feared an invasion of the British Isles from the west by French forces. A watch tower was constructed on the island, one of a chain along the Atlantic coast of Ireland, to give early warning of invasion.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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to put their property in a state of good repair, which, in retrospect, is regarded as a benefit, however much they might have complained of the labor involved during the previous weeks.

The sacred well, probably appropriated from the Druids 13 centuries ago, still attracts the folk and occasionally pilgrims from Inis Thiar and other islands. On the mainland, patterns often were associated with holy wells named after saints, but this does not seem to have been the case in Inis Beag. It was customary until about ten years ago for those who came to pray here to attach bits of cloth, rosaries, or sacred objects obtained from holy places of pilgrimage on the mainland and abroad, but this practice was halted by the clergy as smacking of paganism. Now it is visited for religious purposes mostly by small groups on Sunday afternoon, and by persons about to emigrate and their families who come to pray for the good fortune of the soon departed. The water in the spring is not considered holy, but capable of "bringing the grace of God and the saint," and if it is drunk during prayer, it is believed to be especially efficacious for curing sterility, among other afflictions. In this century, a partially blind islander is believed to have regained his sight after paying nine visits to the well on successive Sundays, and other miraculous cures from earlier times are reported. Those who come to the spring always seek a tiny fish or eel in the water, which, if observed, is merely a good omen to some but an assurance of reaching Heaven to others. Attaching rags to the well and seeking cures and omens there are all examples of reinterpretation. The spring also is used as a source of water by farmers who pasture stock in nearby fields and by thirsting passersby.

Pagan Supernaturalism

Pagan supernaturalism is disavowed by the folk, and it is difficult to know how widely held are beliefs in this sphere. That they are held is indisputable, as attested by the active efforts of curates up to this day to eradicate them. Youth of the island overtly deny the existence of other than church approved spiritual entities, although the most outspoken disclaimer of paganism among them is visited occasionally by the ghost of his father, who urges the continuation of a family feud. But elders cling tenaciously to indigenous beliefs and practices, about which they are extremely secretive for fear of being ridiculed by outsiders and their more skeptical fellows. Defensive about being labeled backward, the islanders feel that the "superstitions" they are said to hold most contribute to this impression. When the folk talk of pagan retentions and reinterpretations, they ascribe them to those who lived at the time that their parents or grandparents did, or to certain of their superstitious contemporaries. A notorious dissenter, who sometimes has occasion to patrol the shores of Inis Beag before dawn, antagonizes his neighbors by deriding them for their fear of venturing after dark to the back of the island, where fairies and ghosts hold sway. On telling him of my intention to spend a night resting atop a *clochán* near the Atlantic coast, he said, "The only thing that will happen is you'll hear the cocks crow in the morning." He is the only person who admitted to me that he disbelieves the teachings of the church concerning the soul

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and its fate. In further mocking his fellows for their apprehensions about death and its aftermath, he proclaimed that the soul, "if there is such a thing, goes nowhere after the heart stops beating."

Celtic deities no longer are a part of the belief system of the islanders, but the culture heroes of the Iron Age—such as Cuchulainn, Finn, and Oisin—still are extolled in legends, and the promontory fort and other ancient monuments and some of the geographical features (for instance, glacial boulders) in Inis Beag and nearby islands are explained by the actions of Celtic heroes. Spirits, demons, and witches of many sorts are the supernatural beings from the Celtic, and possibly pre-Celtic, era which figure most importantly in the pagan segment of the folk religion. They have become incorporated into orthodox Catholicism by being declared "works of the Devil" by those who admit to their existence (It is said that two priests of peasant background have admitted to this belief publicly in Inis Beag.)—a reinterpretation resorted to by many primitive and folk peoples under the duress of acculturation with dominance. The spiritual entities most linked with the Irish, both in writings and in popular imagination, are the trooping and solitary fairies, known to the islanders as the "little people," "good people," or "gentry." In Inis Beag, only the leprechaun and "red man" among the numerous solitary fairies are known. William Butler Yeats numbers the banshee, mermaid, pookah, and water horse among the solitary fairies (Yeats ND :76-77), but these are not regarded as such by the folk (The latter two are animal spirits, or demons, rather than human spirits.); also found in Inis Beag are the sea spirit, or "headless body," and other minor spirits and demons.

Fairies seldom permit themselves to be seen, but most of the islanders have experienced their presence, if only through having objects mysteriously misplaced by them or hearing them sing and cobble. These beings differ considerably in appearance—according to type, sex, and age—but most of them are knee-high and wear green jackets, flat red caps, and buckled shoes. The trooping fairies live in *clochán* and thorn bushes and spend most of their time feasting, singing, dancing, fighting, playing games, and making love. A spirited hurling match played by fairies on the strand was described to me by an observer who had witnessed it from a canoe approaching the island; he and his mates rowed close enough to overhear the creatures call out to each other by name. Small whirlwinds are a sign of their passing, and a farmer who was haying and failed to say the proper "God bless them.", as such a wind stirred his field, was punished by having all of the cocks that he had accumulated blown away. One verse of my ballad, poorly received by most islanders, tells of men who were afraid to board the freighter for several nights after trooping fairies had been seen dining in the mess and a ghost pacing the deck. Fairies disregard human beings most of the time, but they can harm those who disregard or speak ill of them, as well as play "fairy pranks" out of sheer capriciousness. One of their favorite modes of attack is to cast "fairy darts" at their victims; on the mainland, these are prehistoric flint artifacts, but in Inis Beag they are any small pebbles supposedly thrown from the sky to cause bodily harm. An Inis Thiar man collected a number of darts allegedly cast at him by irate gentry, only to have the collection confiscated by the curate in whom he indiscreetly confided. The most feared practice of trooping fairies is that of steal-

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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persons considered overly superstitious. Interesting to note here is the fact that even before the beginning of this century, strength of belief in the pagan supernatural varied among the folk.

Three water dwellers found in the ocean surrounding Inis Beag are the mermaid, sea spirit, and water horse. At least one and maybe three mermaids are associated with particular locations along the coastline of the island. This spirit usually is found sitting on a rock with her fish tail in the water and combing her long hair, although she has been seen hovering over the surface of the sea in a "robe of mist." Discussion of her in the pubs always induces embarrassment among the men, because her perfectly formed female upper body is nude and not always hidden by her tresses; she appears to delight in exposing herself to the puritanical folk. The sea spirit is called the "headless body" for the reason that his seaweed covered hulk lacks any appendages. Like the seal who bears a human soul, he favors following in the wake of *currach*—bobbing up and down in the water and staring balefully at the seamen with huge eyes. Only by dropping an object containing gold into the ocean deeps, which the spirit finds irresistible, can his pursuit be impeded short of rowing back to the island. My wife and I brought to Inis Beag a foot-high statue of a troll, purchased two years before in Norway, made of moss with large glass eyes, which we hung from the wall of our kitchen (as we had from the dashboard of our car) as a good luck charm. It aroused excitement among fishermen who visited us because of its resemblance to the headless body; one man reasoned that this being must inhabit all of the northern seas, and probably arouses equal consternation among Scottish and Scandinavian seafarers. The water horse is a demon counterpart of the mermaid, with black body of a steed and tail of a giant fish. Until 40 years ago, it lived in the fresh water lake of Inis Beag, where it was seen on certain nights traveling abreast the surface with its head held high and mane waving in the wind. Now it is seen only at sea and infrequently at great distance.

The single pookah of Inis Beag resides in a Copper-Bronze Age tumulus (see Fig. 12), which became a medieval cemetery with rough headstones still in place; located on the western margin of the common land, it is known as the Hill of Ferns. In the Middle Ages, the church urged systematic reinterpretation of Christian and pagan elements (It was advocated as early as 601 by Pope Gregory VII in a letter to priests who were proselytizing the primitive Britons.). This policy is attested in Inis Beag and neighboring islands not only by Christian graveyards being located contiguous to pagan ones, but by Christian church buildings incorporating Druidic temples and Celtic holy wells being appropriated by Christian worshippers. During the day, the "dog of the tumulus," as this demon is called, will twist the limbs of unwary individuals who chance to fall asleep on the mound, and at night it is known to race across the sands of strand and common land, altering its size at will from that of a small dog to that of a bull, to frighten those who might be passing. It appears that Irish emigrants carried both the mermaid and pookah abroad with them as early as the seventeenth century, at least to the West Indies. In doing research among the "Black Irish" of Montserrat during 1965, 1966, and last year, I discovered a mermaid with white skin who guards a pot of gold buried on top of Chance's Mountain, and a pookah in the form of a

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misfortune to those whom he compliments. The extent of his power is measured by how soon after the compliment his victim suffers, and how serious is the calamity. Most feared of recent witches is a man who as a youth caused a newly arrived curate on his first walk of the island to fall and break his leg; within seconds after the boy praised the vigorous stride of the priest, "the poor creature disappeared behind a fence, feet over head." The folk seldom compliment one another, and when they do they append "God bless you." to the statement as a precautionary incantation. Persons with the evil eye neglect to do this, it is said. I often have wondered—when in a mood to credit the existence of fairies which turn on water faucets in the dead of night—if a series of misfortunes which befell me during 1960 and 1961 was somehow linked to one of these persons wishing me a good year, without uttering "God bless you.", as my wife and I put off the strand in a canoe at the end of our research. The same incantation is voiced by those in the vicinity of one who sneezes—in this case to prevent his soul from being captured by the fairies. It is tempting to attribute the unwillingness of Irish peasants generally to pay compliments to the age-old but now forgotten dread of being accused of the evil eye and of inviting fairies and hag witches to substitute changelings for human children.

Priests of the church at least a century ago rid Inis Beag of most religious practitioners of pagan disposition, but there is evidence that before their acculturative influence was felt diviners and workers of good and evil magic practiced techniques which had their roots in the Iron Age. Divining now is restricted mostly to the seeking of omens by everyone, and the astrological and tea leaf reading skills of several persons who do not charge for their services. The principal workers of magic in the past were herbalists, animal doctors, and bone setters; an animal doctor in Inis Beag and a bone setter in a nearby island still ply their inherited specialties for pay, but both men claim that they are practical folk physicians and do not command pagan or Christian spiritual powers. Just as the islanders share a common body of omens which are used to avoid the misfortunes and compound the benefits in store for them, they also share a common knowledge of folk medicines, which some believe to be more efficacious than the medicines provided by doctor and nurse. Indigenous medicines once were prescribed by workers of magic, misnamed "herb witches"—old women who gathered plants at dawn and "brewed" them in a variety of ways to affect various cures. The dew on the plants, as well as the manner in which they were compounded, gave these medicines a magical potency. To meet such a witch as she was returning from collecting ingredients meant that one was doomed to take on the affliction of the patient being treated by the hag. A similar belief, well represented in the folklore of the islanders, is the transference of disease from a human being to an animal that he has befriended earlier.

Christian and Pagan Reinterpretations

The four quarterly festivals of the Celts were: Imbolc, celebrated on February 1st, Beltaine on May 1st, Lughnasa on August 1st, and Samhain on November 1st.

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539 796 origin, and the church honors St. Martin of Tours in the liturgy of November 11th. O Suilleabhain suggests that the Catholic feast has been reinterpreted with [178] a pagan festival, which had the sacrificial shedding of blood as one of its main [182] facets. St. Martin also is associated with the grinding of corn and with miraculous [252] powers for causing growth in plants and creating animals from inanimate matter. 796 In Inis Beag, the saint is regarded as a miller who was martyred in Ireland during 796 the Middle Ages by being cast under a mill wheel and ground to death. A few • 798 islanders still observe the taboos of not turning wheels or spinning on the vigil 796 and feast day to honor his martyrdom. The Sunday before St. Martin's Day is 796 called "bloody Sunday," when those who can afford to do so butcher a sheep to be 782 consumed by the family on the feast day; others less fortunate kill a fowl or duck [234] during the vigil. Using the sacrificed animal's blood, the father or mother makes [825] the sign of the cross on the forehead of each member of the family, while praying [237] that the saint guard the safety of all in the year to follow. Some folk use the blood to bless in a like manner the fireplace, bedposts, front door, and outbuildings; all crosses, including those on the forehead, are allowed to remain until obliterated by natural causes.

796 825 417 53 Just as the girls of Inis Beag carry the Brigid's Doll and beg from door to door on the feast day of the saint, the boys do the same with a wren attached to a long wooden pole on the morning of St. Stephen's Day, the feast day following Christmas. The "wrenboys" travel in pairs and are invited into each home, where they are awarded coins for dancing and singing this song:

> Wren, wren, the king of the birds,
> St. Stephen's Day he was caught in the furze.
> So little I am, my family is great.
> Get up landlady and give us a break.
>
> Up with the kettle and down with the pan,
> And give us a shilling to carry the wren.
> If you haven't a shilling a ha'penny will do.
> If you haven't a ha'penny—God bless you.

Handkerchiefs, ribbons, and a sprig of holly also are attached to the pole, and in 1959 only one pair of youths managed to "hunt the wren" successfully and thus maintain the tradition. A home is not blessed by these visitations, as in the case of the groups of girls on St. Brigid's Day, but the act of giving money is believed [184] to bring luck to the household. In some regions of the mainland, wrenboys wear straw masks, animal skins, or horns, and carry the wren on a holly bush or decorated wooden tray as they march in procession shouting and singing songs to the accompaniment of homemade skin tambourines (Evans 1957:279). Little is known of the pagan roots of the ceremony.

771 776 711 715 In addition to the reinterpretations associated with the holy well and with Celtic festivals, there are many others of lesser significance of which only three will be considered here: beliefs concerning ghosts, the evil eye, and the afterworld. We have seen that most of the folk have had contact of some sort with the fairies; they also have witnessed ghosts—called "shades"—in corporeal form in Inis Beag or sailing the surrounding waters. These beings, who "aren't of this world," some-

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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places a high premium upon continence, penance and, in most spheres of life, on abstemiousness (Humphreys 1966: 25–26).

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Humphreys further points out that "the effects of the religious tradition of the Irish, let alone of the countryman, upon the social behavior and attitudes of the people has never been systematically studied from a sociological point of view." He notes that the classic study, *Family and Community in Ireland*, by Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, based on research done over thirty years ago, "leaves the matter virtually untouched," and "attributes the countryman's attitude towards sex almost exclusively to the structure of life in the rural community."

> Granted the profound influence social structure has on such a basic matter, a purely structural-functional analysis is hard put to explain adequately the quite ascetic sexual morality of the Irish countryside. . . . [An] attitude similar to that of the countryman is far from uncommon in a city such as Dublin—and among New Dubliners and Old Dubliners to boot—whose social structure differs so radically from that of the countryside. Structural-functional explanations of attitudes do hold up to a point. But world-views and their ethical consequences also have their special effect (Humphreys 1966: 24–27).

Monasticism and Augustinianism certainly "set the stage" for later Jansenism, although all three probably are connected with basic Irish culture and personality traits of long standing.

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Jansenism is succinctly placed in its historical context in Ireland by Joe McCarthy.

> Like most everything in Ireland, the severe strictness of the old-time Catholic clergymen was rooted in historical events of the country's past. During the dark era of the anti-Catholic Penal Laws in the 18th Century, young Irishmen had to study for the priesthood on the Continent. In the early 1790's, the British Government became alarmed by the rise of Theobald Wolfe Tone's Irish Protestant revolutionary movement and made hurried bids of appeasement to Irish Catholics in an effort to win their loyalty. One of these conciliatory moves was the establishment of the Catholic theological seminary at Maynooth in 1795. Perhaps not entirely by accident, the faculty of the new college was staffed by refugees from the French Revolution, promonarchy theologians who hated Tone's republican ideas. Most of these theologians had been influenced by Jansenism—the rigid and gloomy doctrine, denounced as Calvinistic by the Jesuits, that man is a helplessly doomed being who must endure punishing soul-searching and rigorous penances to prove his love of God. Mere faith and constant church-going . . . are not

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enough to win salvation. . . . Thanks to the influence of the French theologians at Maynooth, most of the Irish Catholic hierarchy sided with the British against Tone in the rebellion of 1798, and supported Prime Minister William Pitt's Act of Union. Their forbidding and stern Jansenist theory strongly flavored Irish Catholicism until it was finally officially discouraged in the middle of the 19th Century. The last vestiges of the doctrine have long since disappeared from Irish Catholicism, but the unusual devotion of the Irish people today to physically punishing religious pilgrimages possibly could be traced in part back to the old teaching of Maynooth that love of God must be demonstrated by harder acts than receiving the sacraments and going to daily Mass (McCarthy 1964: 78).

Our research reveals that in some areas of Ireland "the last vestiges of the doctrine" are still associated with Irish Catholicism. In fact, one Dublin social scientist with whom I correspond asserts that Jansenism as manifested in sexual repression probably reached its zenith in the 1930s and has gradually been dying out since then. However, it is still very apparent, even among "emancipated" Dubliners of the middle and upper classes.

A much harsher evaluation of Jansenism, again in an historical context, is found in Bryan McMahon's chapter in *The Vanishing Irish*, edited by Fr. John O'Brien, a collection which also includes pertinent essays by Arland Ussher and the editor himself. McMahon says:

> Associated with the heresy of Jansenism were the principles of an exaggerated moral and disciplinary rigorism under the pretext of a return to the primitive Church. The Celtic spirit, despite or rather because of its essential volatility . . . would appear to me to provide an ideal field for the culture of Jansenism. The penances of the early Celtic monks were severity itself. . . . Today, when the idea of physical penance would appear to be repugnant to the entire world, such laudable manifestations of physical denial as the exercises of Lough Derg and Croagh Patrick are beacons amid the darkness. But the danger is that by a flaw in the Celtic nature we are apt to be led by overcompensation into penitential excesses; then it is that the traits of Jansenism are there to fill lacunae in our nature. Significant in this context is the presence of four refugee doctors of the Sorbonne on the staff of Maynooth College in its early and formative years. [Their] teachings . . . cannot but have in some measure colored . . . the whole course of Irish seminary life and consequently the whole body of Irish lay thought (O'Brien 1953: 215–216).

Might not the "volatile nature" of the "Celtic spirit" and the "flaw in the Celtic nature" whose "lacunae" Jansenism fills be persistent maso-